

Abused Women: Information Needs, Behaviors, & Services

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Women in abusive relationships constitute a unique user group with specific information needs and behaviors. This annotated bibliography includes essential literature related to the information needs, sources, and behavior of abused women, as well as materials that focus on pertinent and potential library services.

I. Information Needs

Westbrook, L. (2009). Crisis information concerns: Information needs of domestic violence survivors. *Information processing & management* 45(1), 98-114.

This study looks to identify information needs in Intimate Partner Survivors. Analysis reveals 3 progressive situations of information needs: considering a change from an abusive situation, adjusting to change while in the shelter or criminal justice system and preparing for post-shelter/police life. An additional continual need of legal information need is also identified. It touches on the difference between crisis-orientated needs, and everyday information needs. The article goes more in depth talking about information needs that lead to a complete life change: education, job, financial counseling, housing, government assistance, counseling, child care, schools, etc.

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II. Information Sources

Feighny, K., Muelleman, R. (1999), Effects of an emergency department-based advocacy program for battered women on community resource utilization. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 33, 62-66.

This study tracked the number of women who accepted help and advocacy from hospital staff after being admitted into the emergency room as a result of domestic violence. It identifies the emergency room as a main information source and reaffirms the information needs mentioned in the other readings.

Lenaghan, P., Muelleman, R., Pakieser, R., (1998), Battered women: Where they go for help. *Journal of Emergency Nursing*, 24, 16-19.

This study identified popular information resources for domestic abuse survivors. Conducted surveys revealed these resources to be family and friends, police assistance, emergency departments and additional resources such as the YWCA, other women's groups, legal counsel and clergy members.

Westbrook, L. (2007), Digital information support for domestic violence victims. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 58, 420–432. DOI: 10.1002/asi.20520

This article focuses on digital based support for domestic violence/IPV survivors. It examines the survey-identified resources women turn to in an increasingly digital world, touching on the impact the digital divide has on information seeking. It looks at email, online support groups and online support searches and how women access these resources including how they do so safely if computer use is being monitored.

III. Information Seeking Behavior

Dunne, J. E. (2002). Information seeking and use by battered women: a "person-in-progressive-situations" approach. *Library & Information Science Research*, 24(4), 343-355. DOI: 10.1016/S0740-8188(02)00132-9

This article is an early example of the theoretical work that examines information behavior of abuse survivors within the framework of the Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) model. In addition to introducing an ELIS approach, the author defines three kinds of barriers – personal, responsive, and situational – that may inhibit information seeking. The goal of Dunne's research is not necessarily to develop a universalized information-seeking model, but rather to describe a possible progression of information needs.

Gondolf, E. W., & Fisher, E. R. (1988). *Battered women as survivors: An alternative to treating learned helplessness*. Lexington, KY: Lexington Books.

Through an analysis of 6,000 intake and exit interviews with shelter residents, this book counteracts the popular emphasis on treating abused women's "learned helplessness" through help-seeking materials. The authors posit that, as abuse escalates, women do not become more passive or submissive, but rather their information seeking behaviors intensify. Materials that focus on the psychological condition of the abused woman rather than on providing concrete information regarding escape planning thus do women a great disservice.

Harris, R., Stickney, J., Grasley, C., Hutchinson, G., Greaves, L., & Boyd, T. (2001). Searching for help and information: Abused women speak out. *Library & Information Science Research*, 23(2), 123-141. DOI: 10.1016/S0740-8188(01)00066-4

This article discusses the findings of a study of one hundred and five women who suffered abuse by their intimate partners. The women described their information and help-seeking experiences. Study results are evaluated with a focus on developing successful community coordination mechanisms that can overcome common barriers to information seeking among abuse survivors. While many studies of this sort rely on surveys women whose help seeking was at least somewhat successful because they had found their way to a shelter, this study is unique in that nearly half the respondents were still in an abusive relationship.

Nurius, P. S., Macy, R. J., Nwabuzor, I., & Holt, V. L. (2011). Intimate partner survivors' help seeking and protection efforts: a person-oriented analysis. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(3), 539-566. DOI: 10.1177/0886260510363422

The purpose of this article is to apply person-oriented methodology for a survivor-centered investigation of variations in help-seeking and protective actions among women in accordance with subgroup membership. The study utilizes empirical evidence as the foundation for service recommendations that correlate with the needs of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) survivors.

IV. Library Services

Brinkman, A. (2004). Stopping the violence at home. *Library Journal*, 129(13), 48-49.

This article discusses how library collection development policy can be created in order to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence.

Cantwell, J. (2007). New technology means new dangers for domestic violence victims. *AALL Spectrum*, 12(2), 6-9.

This report discusses the different considerations librarians, in particular law librarians, need to take into account when assisting victims of domestic violence. Considerations of privacy, confidentiality and security are key to protecting these victims who are seeking out information and resources to get help.

Davenport, D.D., Richey, J., & Westbrook, L. (2008). E-government access to social service information: State web resources for domestic violence survivors. *Journal of American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59(6), 903-915.

This study evaluates the content and structure of online resources for victims of domestic violence created and maintained by state government websites.

Dewdney, P., Harris, R.M., & Lockerby, C. (1996). Meeting the information needs of battered women: Responsibilities and roles for library and information science. *Reference Librarian*, 53, 27-45.

This paper describes two studies in which social service network is considered as a type of information system and then questions the effectiveness of this system to the needs of battered and abused women. It also provides suggestions for how library professionals can provide better services to this user group as well as inform social service providers and policymakers/decision makers to also better serve this group.

Megison, S., & Westbrook, L. (2009). Hospital dissemination of information resources on intimate partner violence: statewide analysis of Texas emergency room staff. *Journal of Hospital Librarianship*, 9(3), 231-248. DOI: 10.1080/15323260903019360

This article notes the results of a study involving statewide dissemination of information to IPV victims by emergency room staff in Texas. Through analyzing the type, utility and formats of the information, as well as through ER staff suggestions, the authors conclude that hospital librarians could play a vital role in support the staff and patients dealing with the effects of IPV.

Wathen, C.N., & McKeown, S. (2010). Can the government really help? Online information for women experiencing violence. *Government Information Quarterly*, 27, 170-176.

This paper examines and evaluates e-government resources provided in Canada for victims of domestic violence.

Westbrook, L. (2008). E-government support for people in crisis: An evaluation of police department website support for domestic violence survivors using "person-in-situation" information need analysis. *Library & Information Science Research*, 30, 22-38.

This article examines the information resources available on police department websites to serve victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). By examining the information needs and information seeking model of these abuse victims using the ELIS model, the author discovers major gaps and problems that must be resolved in order for effective local e-government social service information delivery to this vulnerable user population.

Westbrook, L., & Gonzalez, M. E. (2011). Information support for survivors of intimate partner violence: Public librarianship's role. *Public Library Quarterly*, 30(2), 132-157. DOI: 10.1080/01616846.2011.575709

This article discusses how public librarians--who have an understanding of the complex information needs and barriers to intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors--may be able to provide services and policies to enhance the safety, privacy and confidentiality of these survivors.

Wilmoth, W. S. (2008). Using the tools of crisis intervention and empowerment counseling in the reference interview. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 45(1), 9-13.

This article describes how reference interview may be used to also provide empowerment counseling and crisis intervention to victims of sexual assault. The article describes how reference librarians may be able to take on this role when victims and/or survivors are in search of relevant and helpful information.